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THE LITERARY PROBLEM OF GEN. I.—III.

BY PROF. GEORGE H. SCHODDE, PH. D.,

Capital University, Columbus, Ohio.

The question of the right of a literary analysis of the Pentateuch lies at the basis of all the Old Testament discussions of the last century. The key-note of these discussions was struck by the Roman Catholic physician in France, Astruc, when, in 1753, he published his *Memoires*, in which he defended the position that Moses, in writing the Book of Genesis, had drawn chiefly from two sources,—one with the name Elohim, the other with the name Jehovah for God,—and, to a limited extent, had used ten other documents. This idea met, at first, with more opposition than favor. But when later introduced into German critical circles, chiefly through the advocacy, though in modified form, of the influential Eichhorn, it readily and speedily secured the adherence of nearly every Old Testament specialist. And to-day a doubt as to the fact of an analysis is rarely expressed by a German scholar. That the Pentateuch is a literary composition drawn from various sources, and that the stratifications in its structure are readily discernible to the critical eye, is, among Germans, almost an axiom; it is certainly a fixed tradition of critical investigation. The question is no longer whether these books can be analyzed, but *how* this is to be done. It is significant that, in Wellhausen's elaborate analysis of the Hexateuch, he does not, with a single sentence, defend the right of this process, but proceeds immediately to dissect the various chapters. Undoubtedly much of the fruitlessness of the Pentateuchal controversy, of late, has been owing to the fact that this state of affairs is but imperfectly understood and appreciated by those who would defend the old traditional views. In the American phase of the controversy especially, little attention has been paid to this side of the question. As matters actually stand, the discussion between the conservative and the more liberal scholars starts from different premises; the latter arguing from the stand-point of the analysis as a "sure" result of modern investigation; the former treating the matter, often ignorantly and superficially, as something of little moment and of less foundation. Now, as a matter of fact, we do not have that critical process as an historical background which Germany has; and if the results of this process are to be refuted, it will be necessary to examine the sources whence they are drawn. In other words, the composite character and the literary analysis, especially of the Pentateuch, must receive the attention which its fundamental position among Old Testament problems deserves. What we propose is to submit, for information and study, a concise statement of the controversy so far as it relates to Gen. I.—III. This is done, not in order to discuss the pros and cons of the question, but rather to show *what* these are, and thus to aid the student in settling the matter for himself.

The thesis of the analyst is briefly this: These chapters did not originally belong to one and the same literary work, but were drawn from two different sources by the writer and editor of the Pentateuch, or rather Hexateuch. The portion drawn from the first source is chap. I. 1—II. 4a; that drawn from the second is II. 4b to the end of III. and further. The arguments adduced for this claim are not always the same by all writers, but the leading propositions are these:

The use made of the names for God shows the composite character of these chapters. It will be noticed that up to chap. II. 4a only the name Elohim is employed for this purpose, while after that, with one exception, only the double name *Jehovah Elohim* is found. There can be no doubt as to the facts in the case; the only question is as to the meaning of these facts. The analyst claims that these facts indicate that one of the literary sources employed the name *Elohim* exclusively for God; it is, therefore, generally called the *Elohistic* document; the other work used exclusively the word *Jehovah* (or *Yahweh*) for this purpose, and is accordingly called the *Yahvistic* document, the name *Elohim* in Gen. II. 4 seq. being added later by the editor or redactor of the whole work. This conclusion is drawn, however, not only from these chapters, but from the whole Book of Genesis and the first six chapters of Exodus. It will be seen, by an examination of these portions, that often whole chapters use exclusively the name *Jehovah*, and others exclusively the name *Elohim* for the divinity. This is done by the latter document down to Exod. VI., where verse 2 seq. are interpreted to mean that according to the Elohistic writer, of whose document this chapter forms a part, the name of *Jehovah* had not been revealed to the fathers, but that God had been known to them only by the name *El Shaddai*, which is accepted as the equivalent of *Elohim*. This word the Elohistic writer from these premises uses for God down to Exod. VI., but after that he uses *Jehovah* and *Elohim* promiscuously. The Yahvistic writer is represented as not having acted from this historical standpoint, and has been guilty of the anachronism of using "*Jehovah*" also in the days preceding the exodus.

This certainly remarkable use of the names of God down to the sixth chapter of Exodus is accompanied by other facts that are used to prove that the Elohistic and Jehovistic sections should be separated. It is noticed that each of these sections shows certain peculiarities of style and diction not found in the other. In regard to Gen. I.-III. alone, Dillmann, in his edition of Knobel's Commentary, draws attention to the following: The Yahvistic writer, i. e., the author of chap. II. 4b seq., uses the verb "to make" or "to form," while the Elohist uses "to create;" the animals are called "beasts of the field," and not "beasts of the earth;" he speaks of "the shrub of the field" and not "the herb of the field." Certain expressions* peculiar to Gen. II. and III. are never found, or only rarely, in the sections where Elohim is used.

This argument is rounded by the claim that the various Elohistic and Yahvistic sections differ in their manner of representing and describing events. In regard to the chapters before us, Dillmann says that over against the simple manner of chap. I., in which the leading facts are emphasized, chap. II. 4b seqq. shows a decided preference for the description of side-issues and cause and effect, as also for picture sceneries, for views growing out of a closer reflection and more thoughtful study. The manner of speaking of God is more familiar than that of the Elohist, e. g., God *forms* the animals and man; he *breathes* into his nostrils the breath of life; he *plants* the garden of Eden; he takes a rib out of Adam and *makes* it into a woman, and *closes* the opening; he *brings* the animals to man; he *walks* in the cool of the evening; he speaks as though *jealous* of man. Out of these facts and facts of a like nature found in connection with sections employing the word Elohim for God, the critics have drawn what they regard as a correct descrip-

* These are הפעם, בעבור, לבלתי, מה זאת, עצבון, לקול, שמע, etc.

tion of the character of the Elohistie and Yahvistic writings. It must be clearly understood that the full force of this argument can not be seen from Gen. I.—III. alone, but an examination must be made of the greater portion of the Pentateuch in order to test the justice or injustice, the weakness or the strength, of this claim.

The conservative scholars, while of course not denying the facts in the case, furnish an entirely different explanation of them. The position is taken that these names have different meanings and that their use is regulated by the sense and the connection; that Elohim is the general term for God and is employed when reference is made chiefly to his omnipotence, and that Jehovah is the name of God when considered as the one who revealed himself to Israel as the gracious God of promise and of the covenant grace. Keil, in his "Introduction" to the Old Testament, § 25, starting from this view, states that Exod. vi. 2, forming an epoch in the history of the relations between Jehovah and Israel, also causes a change in the more or less frequent use of the names for God. Before this epoch God had revealed himself as Jehovah only in promises, and as El Shaddai possessing the power to fulfill his promises. For this reason the name Jehovah is found in the first half of Genesis only where there is reference to the revelation of deliverance commenced actually with the call to Abraham, while Elohim remains the general name for God in relation to the world and the creatures; whereas in the other half of Genesis the same facts continue, but that after God has concluded the covenant and made promises to him as El Shaddai, the latter name is also used as a name for the God of the covenant by the side of Jehovah; and as El Shaddai is then used rather more for poetic diction, the name Elohim is used in its room even to express the special covenant relation; and so in the latter portion of Genesis the name Jehovah occurs but seldom. This difference in the ideas of Jehovah and Elohim holds good throughout the Pentateuch, and the words are never used promiscuously, and a correct interpretation of Exod. vi. 2 seq. will confirm this.* The other matters mentioned in corroboration of this principal argument, the difference in style and manner of presentation, are regarded as being the natural results of the difference in the subject-matter treated, in so far as they are regarded as true conclusions from the text of the book.

The second argument has more exclusive reference to the chapters before us, and consists in the claim that the two writings do not harmonize in their description of the same event, and in reality give different and contradictory accounts of creation. The cautious Bleek, in his *Einleitung*, § 37, voices this view in these words:

"According to chap. i., the creation of the animals takes place before the creation of the human race, both male and female; according to chap. ii., this takes place between the creation of the man and the woman. Then in chap. i., the creation of the herbs of the earth is the immediate result of God's creative word, while in chap. ii. this is represented as dependent upon rain and the work of man. Further, a certain difference between the statements in regard to the original relation existing between God and man cannot be denied, namely, that according to chap. i. man was from the beginning created in the image of God, while in chaps. ii. and iii. it seems that man only gradually had reached this stage through his distinguishing between right and wrong."

While the later writers in the ranks of the analysts have given up the standpoint that we have two rival accounts of creation in these chapters, and teach also

* Cf. Keil, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, *in loco*.

that the statements in the opening verses of chap. II. 4b seq. are but introductory, to the end of chap. II. and of chap. III., and that the object of the whole section is to narrate the fall of man; yet the position is adhered to, that between the statements of the two chapters in reference to the creation of man and of the animals and plants there is a marked difference; and this seems to be not without a foundation in fact, as a careful perusal of these verses will show.

The argument is met by the conservative side with an exegesis of these verses that excludes the possibility of contradictory accounts. The position is taken that these verses are a direct continuation of the previous sections and do not purpose to give a second account of the act of creation at all, but only of the planting and preparation of Eden as the place in which the first stages in the development of man shall take place. The security or insecurity of this position rests to a great extent upon the meaning assigned to a number of leading words in these verses, notably to "the earth" in verse 4 and "was" in verse 5, the former of which is restricted to the garden of Eden and the latter, as a parallel to "sprung up" in the same verse receives the meaning of "growing" or "becoming." Very properly objection is also raised to the translation proposed of II. 4b-7, which makes verses 5 and 6 parenthetical expressions, and verse 7 the continuation of verse 4b. The full facts in the case and the bearings on this question can best be learned by a comparison of the exegesis offered by the representatives of the two schools. Keil is probably the best for the conservative side, and Dillmann as good as any for the side of the analysts. The former is accessible in English, but not the latter.

In this connection we add a few remarks:

1) The problem as such is merely a literary and critical one, and not dogmatical. Only the facts in the case and not any theory concerning the origin and character of the books of the Bible can settle this question. It refers solely to the human side of the origin of the Bible, to the question whether in composing Gen. I.-III. the writer made use of two literary documents and united them in his account, or did not. The great question is, What are the exact facts and what do they imply? The fact that analysts have abused this problem for destructive purposes should not close our eyes to the real character of the question.

2) In itself there can be no objection to a documentary theory. Writing existed at a very early stage, and the facts of revelation were early known at least to some of mankind. Already in Seth's day (Gen. IV. 26) people began to call upon the name of the Lord, and Adam's acts and words in Gen. III. 9 seq. show that he had been made acquainted with God as the creator and the just judge. Nothing is more natural than that these truths revealed so early to mankind should have been put down in a written form by either inspired or uninspired pens, and that the writer of Genesis, in compiling his account of the creation and the fall of man, should have made use of one or more of these records for his purpose. We know from the direct statements of Old Testament history that the inspired writers made it a rule to consult the official records, and we know also that the Pentateuch itself elsewhere quotes from other books. And so considered in itself, the acceptance of a literary analysis of these chapters, or of the whole Book of Genesis, or of the whole Pentateuch, or of any other book, does not conflict with any correct view of the origin of the divine books.

3) Nor does such an acceptance of an analysis, at least of these chapters, in itself involve the rejection of the Mosaic authorship. It must be said, however,

that nearly all of those who accept such an analysis reject the old view that Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch, and understand that he wrote a greater or smaller portion of it. Originally such was not the case, and nothing was further from Astruc's mind than the denial of the Mosaic authorship. The very title of his work reads, "Memoirs which Moses seems to have employed in the composition of Genesis." Of course, the acceptance of the theory in other books than Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus, cannot but involve this denial to a greater or less extent.

4) The leading arguments pro and con are directly connected with the use of the names Jehovah and Elohim, and both methods of explaining the most remarkable use of these words down to Exod. vi., meet with serious difficulties. The acceptance of a difference in the meaning of these terms is justified by facts, but while the application of this view to the earlier chapters of Genesis is quite successful, it is very strained in the last ten or twelve chapters. On the other hand, the analysts have been compelled to accept two documents using the term Elohim, one of which had already been incorporated into the Yahvistic document before this was united with the other Elohist to form our Genesis. We doubt whether an explanation of this phenomenon fully satisfactory and one that can cover all the actual cases, has yet been furnished. The names used for God in Genesis are still the riddle of the Pentateuchal sphinx.

5) The willingness on the part of many analysts to accept "contradictions" in the records of Genesis and elsewhere, strikes us as a violation of the premises from which they proceed. They all accept a redactor who united the alleged documents into one book; yet he seems to have permitted so many opposing statements to remain, that some of the chapters seem little less than a bundle of contradictions. The effort, manifestly, often is not to see if two accounts can be made to harmonize, but whether they can be compelled to militate against each other. Even if we should accept the composite character of the Book of Genesis, the natural supposition is that, as the editor or writer understood these accounts, they were not contradictory. It is absurd to believe that, in a carefully edited book like our Pentateuch, even aside from all divine influence or inspiration, there should have been left hundreds of errors and contradictions. Manifestly the purpose should be to attempt not to make two verses or chapters disagree, but to make them agree, as they evidently were understood to do by their author or editor. Approaching the literary problem of Gen. i.—iii. in this spirit, there seems no valid reason for seeing any contradictory statements in them. It is possible, without any violation of the laws of language or of thought, to see in these chapters a harmonious account of the creation and fall of man. It is, of course, also possible to understand these chapters as giving different accounts of the same thing; but the question remains, Which of these two possibilities is the one to accept? All other things being equal, the former is the more natural and rational, and fair literary criticism, here as elsewhere, will accept this stand-point. Of course, if the chapters do harmonize, this in itself does not decide the question of composite character. The latter is still a possibility; but if such contradictions existed, the analysis would almost be a necessity.

6) We repeat that the object of this article has been merely to state candidly, calmly and fairly, the question in regard to the literary problem of Gen. i.—iii., and not to advocate either side. Which is right? This every conscientious student of God's Word must decide for himself.